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ABSTRACT

Issues of social discrimination of all kinds and in all forms in teaching are discussed. Sexism, racism, ageism, bias by commission versus omission, other objectionable stereotypes, and the difference between accurate portrayal and the ideal are defined. Sixteen suggestions are given for choosing or developing language arts instructional materials that present unbiased views of people. The suggestions focus on the distribution of males and females in the materials; illustration styles; realism of portrayal rather than stereotyping; role portrayal; values attribution; and inclusion of cultural, religious, and ethnic events from a variety of minority groups. Teachers are encouraged to deal directly with issues of bias, talking openly and fairly with students, sensitizing them to bias and suggesting ways to correct it. (MSE)

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Biased Language:

The Urge to Purge

by

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I'd like to begin by reading a captivating statement by Pablo Casals. It requires no further explanation.

Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that never was before and never will be again. And what do we teach our children in school? We teach them that two and two make four and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the world there is no other child exactly like you. In the millions of years that have passed, there has never been a child like you. And look at your body--what a wonder it is! Your legs, your arms, your cunning fingers, the way you move! You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must cherish one another. You must work--we must all work--to make this world worthy of its children.

My name is Jean D'Arcy Maculaitis; I am a Puerto Gringa. Growing up on 97th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue in New York City in the 1950's, I quickly learned what racial prejudice was all about. By age 10, I had changed my name from Juanita María Carmen D'Arcy de Tossas to Jean Marie Darcy to escape, or so I naively thought, the pain of discrimination, by making myself more acceptable to the "dominant" society. At 18, I finally realized that the emotional price of denying my heritage and "passing" was, for many reasons, too great a price to pay. Instead of feeling shame, I began to feel a growing sense of pride in my Hispanic background. It was then that I decided to devote my professional life to helping other second language learners become all they are capable of becoming. However, in time, a new realization made itself felt, *i.e.*, that, as Thomas Wolfe said, "You Can't Go Home Again." In spite of many honors won, academic degrees earned, a home in the suburbs, and so forth, I am, nevertheless, caught in a seemingly endless cultural limbo. I, and others like me, have been sentenced to a kind of earthly purgatory, unwelcomed as a "legitimate" member of the "dominant" society, and more painfully, rejected as an outsider by some members of my native society.

Over the years, I began to perceive in the tone and attitude of some members of my ethnic group a rejection of my "success" as being anathema to my background. What is this distance that is growing between us? Is it that my married name sounds "wrong" or that my English is too good? Do I look and sound too young to

be a Ph.D., and a female Ph.D. at that? Can those who purport to encourage minorities and women to conduct research and to achieve, possibly resent those who they almost fearfully perceive as having "made it" in both worlds and are thereby no longer open to being "controllable?" One is reminded of the passage in Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* where he writes of those who want to make the black man healthy, but not too healthy.

> *...The men can come to the mines and bigger and better compounds can be built for them and still more vitamins be put in their food, but we shall have to be careful about that, because some fellow has discovered that labour can be over-vitaminized. This is an example of the Law of Diminishing Returns.*[1]

While it is somewhat amusing to see the look of surprise on people's faces when they hear of my ethnic background and professional accomplishments, it seems ironic that I feel compelled to defend my Hispanic background to other Hispanics who may be in positions to decide who is awarded a grant or who gets a promotion and who have apparently formed their own stereotypic notion of what an acceptable degree of "Spanishness" is all about. To achieve what I have achieved, I have had to learn how to function in two distinct spheres: one, that of my grandparents, Ramón and Elena Tossas, and the ensuing parentesco; and the other, that of my in-laws and others in the "dominant" culture. During the twelve years I spent completing my

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1 Alan Paton, *Cry the Beloved Country*, New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1948, 171.

academic career, and the nine years I have spent working on a coordinated series of K-12 ESL test batteries, I have *never* lost sight of the fact that I have had to work twice as hard to get where I am--not just because I am a woman, but because I am a young Hispanic woman. I am reminded of the coqui, whose pure voice sings out in the darkness of Puerto Rican nights, enticing those who leave the island to bring the coqui with them, only to find the tiny frog *cannot* survive out of its natural habitat. How painful to be too Puerto Rican for some of my upper middle-class suburban neighbors, but not Puerto Rican enough to be embraced as a *genuine* member of my own group who see me as a "Puerto Gringa." Black friends have pointed out that my plight is *not* unique. Black achievers in all fields have felt the dual cultural stresses of wanting to enjoy their success without having their elation and improved economic and social condition misunderstood or resented by their own people.

I am a very private person. It is not easy for me to expose these painfully intimate thoughts to you. However, I hope these experiences will be a beginning of a sensitizing process whereby we are, each and everyone of us here, more consciously aware of ourselves, our attitudes and how these attitudes are reflected through our everyday language and actions.

As you can see, I am personally *and* professionally concerned with the elimination of all types of bias in all contexts. However, before bias can be eliminated, it must first be recognized for

what it is. For the purposes of this presentation, let's consider the following pertinent definitions:

1 *What is Sexism?*[1] Sexism is anything that limits a person's role in life according to gender (other than actual reproduction.) Usually it takes the form of assigning girls and women to subordinate passive roles, limiting their participation in the areas most valued intellectually and economically in our society, and reinforcing dominant roles and activities outside the home for men and boys.

2 *What is Racism?* Racism is anything that assigns to people an inferior or limited role based on ethnic or national origin, race, religion, or skin color, with the assumption that these characteristics are related to a person's capabilities and behavior. The glorification of one race over others, or the consistent omission of certain races, is also racist.

3 *What is Ageism?* Ageism is anything that limits an individual's role in life according to one's age and restricts that person's participation in all areas valued in our society on the basis of being too old or too young for a particular job or activity?

4 *What is Bias by Commission or Omission?* Modern textbooks and tests rarely offend groups of people by direct statements. More often, the social judgment is implied, making it all the more damaging for its subtlety. Black, brown, native Indian and Oriental children may get the message that there is something wrong with them when all or most of the people in their textbooks are white. Girls may be conditioned

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1 Definitions are from Nancy Roberts, *Guidelines for Creating Positive Sexual and Racial Images in Educational Materials*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975 and the author.

to feel instinctively that the creed "all men are created equal" does not apply to them, children may accept society's rejection of aged people when they show up only in subordinate roles in their reading materials, if at all.

5 *What About Other Objectionable Stereotypes?* We must be sensitive to all text and art that generalizes about people on the basis of irrelevant characteristics, such as physical appearance, monetary status, age, or special abilities. Some objectionable examples are: dumb athletes, stupid beautiful women, skinny intellectuals wearing glasses, fat social misfits, old ladies with twenty cats, or emphasis on the upper classes alone to portray the "typical" lifestyle in a period of history.

6 *What is the Difference Between "Accurate Portrayal" and Ideal Situations?* What can be rather than the negatives that still exist should be emphasized whenever and wherever possible. "Reality" itself is subject to slanted interpretations. For example, the fact that black persons and women do not yet hold a proportionate share of executive positions should not prevent publishers, test writers and others from depicting a sizable number of them as executives. Realistically, persons from *any* group can sometimes be stupid, make mistakes, ask for help; but no one group of people should have a corner on negative attributes.

Like the printed material of a test, all artwork, photographs and so forth should present an unbiased view of people. This, of course, is especially true in tests prepared for elementary school children because they spend approximately 75 percent of their time engaged in some facet of reading and related skills. Many of their texts and tests include illustrations. Many children are unconsciously aware of psychological and sociological values presented in these

language arts materials and tests. Such material must be free of bias. To achieve this goal, all test pictures and content should:

1 present an equal distribution of males and females.

2 use identical illustration techniques to present males and females, *i.e.*, photographs, line drawings, pastel tones, and so forth.

3 not use illustration styles to differentiate between the sexes or underscore stereotype moods, attitudes and/or roles.

4 portray people realistically, *i.e.*, short, tall, fat, skinny, average, some handicapped, bald and so forth, while avoiding stereotypes such as the absent-minded professor, the handsome hero on a white horse, the ugly villain dressed in black, and so forth.

5 portray adult females as not always being subordinate, passive and housebound, but rather they should present the modern woman, one who may work outside the home as well as one who performs numerous roles in the home that are not sexually differentiated, *e.g.*, mowing the lawn, preparing the barbecue, building a birdhouse, repairing a leaky faucet, painting the garage, and so forth.

6 portray adult males as not always being strong, capable, independent, confident and active at home, work and play; the modern man does household chores with or independent of his wife, waves goodby to his wife as *she* leaves for work, is demonstrative with his family, actively participates in being a father, shops for his family, reads while his wife writes at the desk, may lose his composure when upset and show it, and so forth.

7 portray female children as not always being so passive, subordinate and delicate; today's young woman plays ball, catches fish, may want to be a race car driver or a stunt woman in the movies, collects bugs, has a pet snake, wears colors other than pink and/or pastels, and so forth.

8 portray male children as not always being so active and confident; although today's young man may do many of the same things mentioned in #7, he may also enjoy cooking , taking care of his little brother and sister and should not be made to feel that this is unnatural. He may also like getting dressed up once in a while, trying on his dad's or older brother's clothes for fun, wearing colors other than blue, and so forth.

I don't want to belabor the point, but as educators, we must deal squarely in class with the issue of sexual bias. Look, if you can't get rid of books containing sexism and racism, why not point out examples to your students and suggest ways to correct bias? Have your students try, too. It will be a terrific lesson for all of you, and one they will probably enjoy.

Characteristics and roles that have traditionally been ascribed to men and women *are* changing. Men do show emotions and women can be strong without the label homosexual being affixed either by word or by non-verbal cues. It is important to bring out into the open emotions which may be just beneath the surface in our students' minds--a certain smile, a knowing wink across the room, a muttered aside tell you it's time to talk plain talk to your students. Since you are tredding on sensitive historic and cultural traditions, it isn't going to be easy. I hope that would never stop any of you. While our role is not that of preacher, it is certainly that of

teacher. Part of being a teacher is opening eyes, ears and minds to new ideas. We have no problem generating acceptance of heretofore unbelievable advances in technology, from men walking on the moon to microsurgery, but we still fight an uphill battle getting some of our students and colleagues to accept *with seriousness* the fact that a woman might want to work on the docks or a president's son might want to be a ballet dancer. Let's continue now. All test pictures and content should:

9 treat minority groups fairly while avoiding tokenism, paternalism and romanticism, as they tend to perpetuate stereotypes and are offensive.

10 present any historic settings as they *actually* happened, avoiding *all* evasions and distortions of the truth.

11 show minority members as they are in real life displaying, as we all do, a full range of human emotions and behavior.

12 not assume that all advantaged children are white or that a lack of an advantage implies inferiority or applies only to specific ethnic groups; advantages or lack of them are related to one's soci-economic status or physical condition rather than to one's background.

13 not assume that the values of the white majority are universal givens.

14 not omit certain cultures from discussions of non-religious holidays, e.g., several ethnic groups celebrate New Year's at different times during the year not just on the first day of January with which most of us may be more familiar.

15 present backgrounds and scenes which depict a country's ethnic diversity by showing unique cultural settings, events and lifestyles.

16 show a realistic racial mix in urban scenes wherein about half the individuals would be minority group members; however, in other urban, suburban or rural scenes, the ratio might be greater or lesser.[1]

In sum, all test pictures and content should strive to fairly, realistically, and respectfully depict *all* segments of our present day society, as well as those surrounding historic events.

* * STOP AND SHOW EXAMPLES * *

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1 These suggestions are based on the experience of the author and on: 1) Nancy Roberts, *Guidelines for Creating Positive Sexual and Racial Images in Educational Materials* and National Council of Teachers of English, *Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications*, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975.

While it is true that we cannot legislate minds, it is also true that we must put into practice what we cannot effectively go around preaching, that is, *purging begins at home*. For the students we are talking about for the most part, as much waking time is being spent in school as is spent at home. We *must* be positive examples of people shedding the negative bonds of bias through: 1) *active* participation in the selection of unbiased educational materials and assessment tools and 2) actively sensitizing students and as many people as possible who are involved in educating them on a professional and personal level to the tremendous amount of bias in their *own* language and attitudes, as well as the language and attitudes of others. It is so easy to spot bias in someone else. Isn't it astounding how much prejudice exists when you consider the incredible number of times you, too, must have heard, "I'm not prejudiced but...?" Are we as adults not at least partially responsible for the preconceived notions that children have? Can we as educators consider ourselves guiltless if we are not constantly aware of our own language and attitudes, whether it's in front of the classroom, at the supermarket, at a hockey game, or during any other activity in our daily lives.

We, as educators and parents, have a moral responsibility to help eliminate racial, sexual and age bias in our homes, classrooms and communities. Our children are entitled to a life free of the heavy chains of bias. Clearly, there will be difficulties enough ahead for the leaders of the 21st Century without adding this divisive pollutant. Our very survival as a people may depend on it.

** INTRODUCE POEM **

I AM A CHILD

I AM A CHILD
I was born in this world to be.
I am placed in your hands
for your care and
to have your attention.
What I become is shaped by you -
your love,
your interest,
your care,
your talk to me,
your talk about me,
Your work with me.

I AM A CHILD
I was born in this world to be.
I am placed in your class
for your care and
to have your attention.
How I develop is influenced by
what you do for me --
Accept me,
Love me,
Read to me,
Teach me,
Share with me of your love
for life and books.

I AM A CHILD
And although I am having
some problems,
I was born into this world to be.
a child,
a youngster,
an adolescent,
a teen-ager,
a student reader of life.

I AM A CHILD
I was born into this world to be.
What I become is shaped
by your teaching of me.
How I develop and what I achieve
is influenced by your response
to my needs.
You, You, You.
You are important to me
because I AM A CHILD
And you will help shape me into all
I was born into this world to be.

Carole Riggs

Let's *really* listen to young Carole's words. Reach out! Extend more than your hand. Touch somebody's life. I know *we* can.

Look, there is no monopoly on pain caused by bias, but there are active ways to deal with it. Unlike a cut finger that will heal if you wash it off and keep it covered, bias cuts silently. The bleeding is internal. It cannot be washed away or covered up. Rather, it must be exposed to the light and seen for what it is before it can be dealt with and purged. Bias is an intellectual cancer, feeding on emotions and destroying the longer it is allowed to remain undetected or ignored. *We* are the intellectual surgeons who can remove it, and regardless of how long it takes, we will.

Thank You.